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# The murder of the judges – The Akufo-Addo connection

By: Isaac Ato Mensah

The issues surrounding the murder of the judges and retired army officer in 1982 will never go away.

On the 30th June 1982, four eminent Ghanaians were murdered in cold blood after having been abducted from their homes during curfew hours.

The four were Mrs. Justice Cecilia Koranteng-Addow, Mr. Justice Kwadwo Agyei Agyepong, Justice Fred Poku Sarkodie and Major Rtd. Sam Acquah.

What many Ghanaians perhaps do not realise is that Nana Akufo-Addo, NPP Presidential Candidate was very much related to the issues for which they were murdered.

Akufo-Addo used the law courts to overturn some of the most arbitrary, yet ostensibly legally immune decisions of the AFRC regime. Three such cases, one of habeas corpus and the others involving confiscated assets, were before the three murdered judges of June 30, 1982, Justices Cecilia Koranteng-Addow, Poku Sarkodie and K. Agyepong.

Akufo-Addo, as fate would have it, had left Accra on a routine visit to London when news broke that the three judges and retired army Major had been abducted, murdered and their bodies burnt.

Nana Akufo-Addo was the young lawyer whose sheer brilliance in court (before these judges) made these judges overturn certain rulings made by the AFRC.

“... The Major as Director of Personnel at GIHOC was instrumental in the dismissal of workers who demonstrated against injustices based on which they were sacked. Mrs. Justice Koranteng Addo dismissed the writ filed by the dismissed workers who were asking for an interim injunction against their employers...” The above quotation is taken from the book ‘The Judges’ Murder Trial of 1983.’

“That judges make fine and beautiful statements is not necessarily because they are very intelligent.” My law lecturer once proudly stated, “It is largely because lawyers argue before them.”

One such brilliant argument was made by Nana Akufo-Addo, then 36, before Mrs. Justice Koranteng-Addow to convince her that the employers or management must be protected to empower them to discharge their duties. These were the days when employers were always right. Once leadership did not pander to their demands, the leader/s must go.

Justice Cecilia Koranteng-Addow and Akufo-Addo were brave and spoke their minds against the popular view of the day. Hence Nana Akufo-Addo could well have been one of those martyrs. Thank God the significance of June 30 is not lost on him and he continues to fight for the protection of individual liberties and freedoms. Among all the Presidential Candidates, he is the only one who has the enviable record of walking for people’s rights. And Ghanaians know him for this strength.

Of course on occasion, the NDC would call this passion for protecting people's rights "arrogance". Nana is reported to have explained that Ghana needed a man like him in those days to tell Rawlings to his face that he did not own Ghana. But I still say Ghana still needs such a man today.

To protect and fight for peoples liberties

To speak up against instant justice

To speak up against attacks on the judiciary

To protect people's rights from being abused by the system and the establishment. And his response to the question on the Tsikata issue was spot on.

"The courts are the ones who are supposed to protect our rights, said he, "It should therefore be a matter of concern if they are infringing on people's rights."

Come the first year of the Kufuor Administration, Akufo-Addo as Attorney-General submitted the National Reconciliation Bill in Parliament to hear the cases of those who could not find relief in the normal court system, for abuse of human rights due to the transitional provisions in the 1992 constitution to protect Rawlings and his cohorts. And hear what the NRC had to say about the murder of the judges.

"The truth was that the murderers knew that they were on an assignment, which had the blessing of the PNDC. Of course, there is no evidence to suggest that the PNDC held a formal meeting at which it was decided to abduct and, perhaps, murder the judges. For a decision of such moment, Rawlings [the chairman of the PNDC] looked to a small coterie of advisors which included Capt. Kojo Tsikata and Tsatsu Tsikata."

It is this same Tsatsu Tsikata on whose behalf handkerchiefs with inscriptions are being circulated against his conviction and two female judges are being lambasted. And it is this same Akufo-Addo who as Attorney-General preferred charges against Akufo-Addo for which Tsikata has now been sentenced, albeit for a different offence and judges are being bastardised.

The NRC report said: "[Amartey] Kwei was right: without official backing, he had neither the capacity nor the means to commit such a heinous crime." The report states further, "The [special investigations board] found Capt Tsikata to be a co-conspirator in the abduction and cold blooded murder of the judges and the retired army officer. But, like Amartey Kwei, Capt Tsikata could not by himself have carried out the deed because he was not even a member of the PNDC.

"It needed the authority of someone higher up, and that person was Flt Lt Rawlings who, according to evidence before the Commission, threatened to punish the judges who had freed so-called AFRC convicts. Without his express orders, or tacit approval, the operational pass would not have been issued to Amedeka and his gang."

Nana Akufo-Addo must therefore speak up and continue to fight harder to protect people's rights as history seems to be repeating itself.

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